(b) whether it is also a fact that active and meaningful efforts have been made by Government for these tea estates but fruitful result has not been achieved so far; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) As per available information, as on 1.4.2007, 33 tea gardens were lying closed of which 17 were in Kerala, 14 in West Bengal and 2 in Assam. The total number of workers affected due to closure of these gardens was about 31,000.

(b) and (c) With the efforts of the Centre and State Governments eight gardens in Kerala and two in West Bengal have opened recently.

Import of vanaspati

2321. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government allowed Sri Lanka to export vanaspati at zero per cent duty when Sri Lanka is neither the producing country of crude oil nor having its own source of packaging materials;

(b) if so, how Indian industry will survive by paying 51.5 per cent duty when such duty free import is allowed;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Sri Lankan exporters were reluctant to supply vanaspati through NAFED as they did not meet quality standard; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) Under India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA), which became operational in the year 2000, Vanaspati was in the free list and could be imported from Sri Lanka at zero duty. Initially there was no restrictions on quantity to be exported by Sri Lanka.

(b) Government has taken several steps to help domestic industry like:

(i) the fixing of a Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) of 2.5 lakh MT on import of Vanaspati, baker shortening and margarine from Sri Lanka to India since November, 2006 under ISFTA.

(ii) allowing import of oilseeds/edible oils except copra/coconut oil on OGL

(iii) concessional rate of import duty on certain vegetable oils for manufacture of refined oilA'anaspati.

(iv) reduction in import duty on crude palm oil and refined palm oil.

(v) increase in import duty on Vanaspati, bakery shortening, margarine from 30% to 80%.

(c) and (d) As the Government of Sri Lanka agreed on Voluntary Export Restraint of 2.50 lakh MT, the canalization of Vanaspati including bakery shortening and margarine through NAFED was no longer relevant it was de-notified. No relaxations from quality standards has been given.

Removal of ban on sugar import

†2322. SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to remove the ban on the export of sugar;

(b) if so, from which date this decision will be effective and what will be the quantity of export of sugar; and

(c) whether the prices of sugar are not likely to rise further in the country by this decision?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN. THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) Sugar export (except restricted export of preferential quota sugar to EU and USA) was prohibited with effect from 04..07.2006 till 31.03.2007. No quantitative restrictions are prescribed for free sugar exports.

(c) Sugar prices and its future projections show a steady decline from April, 2007 onwards.

Export of unmanufactured tobacco to USA

2323. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Tobacco Board has drawn up any plan to encourage export of unmanufactured tobacco to U.S.A. from Andhra Pradesh in 2007-08 and 2008-09;

(b) whether any delegation has been sent to U,S.A. to conclude talks and improve exports of unmanufactured tobacco;

(c) the extent of such tobacco being exported presently to USA in 2006-07;

(d) the trade and other obstacles which face Indian exporters to U.S.A. for this product; and

(e) the discussions held in this regard with U.S. Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

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† Original notice of tl\p question was received in Hindi.